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Introduction: Academic Labour, Digital Media and Capitalism

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Modern universities have always been part of and embedded into capitalism in political, economic and cultural terms. In 1971, at the culmination of the Vietnam War, the Chomsky-Foucault debate reminded us of this fact when a student asked: "How can you, with your very courageous attitude towards the war in Vietnam, survive in an institution like MIT, which is known here as one of the great war contractors and intellectual makers of this war?" (Chomsky and Foucault 2006, 63). Chomsky responded dialectically, but also had to admit that the academic institution he is working for is a major organisation of war research and thereby strengthens the political contradictions and inequalities in capitalist societies.

Edward P. Thompson (1970), one of the central figures in the early years of British cultural studies, edited *Warwick University Ltd* in the 1970s. Thompson was working at the University of Warwick then and published together with colleagues and students a manuscript that discovered, as the title suggests, the close relationship of their university with industrial capitalism. The book also revealed some evidence of secret political surveillance of staff and students by the university, which was uncovered by students occupying the Registry at Warwick at that time.

In a more recent context, the renowned Marxist geographer David Harvey faced an interview question about managerialism and the pressure to raise external funding at his university, City University of New York: "I had a dean saying to me that I wasn't bringing in any money. You're worthless, he said, as far as we're concerned. So I asked what I was supposed to do. Was I supposed to set up an Institute of Marxist Studies funded by General Motors? And the dean said, 'Yes, that's a good idea. I'll support you if you can do that'" (Taylor 2010).

The relationship between state control and global capitalism has intensified in the last decades. With the collapse of the welfare state and the drop of public funds, universities are positioning themselves as active agents of global capital, transforming urban spaces into venues for capital accumulation and competing for profits derived from international student populations. In this environment, students have to pay significant amounts of tuition for precarious futures. Similarly, teaching and research faculty across the globe have to negotiate their roles that are often strictly defined in entrepreneurial terms. Increasingly, the value of academic labour is subject to new forms of control, surveillance and productivity. As the recent cases of Steven Salaita (USA), Academics for Peace (Turkey) and the crackdown against students in India reveal, academic labour and academics in general are also facing immense challenges in terms of state control and freedom of speech.

Situated in this economic and political context, the overall task of this special issue of *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* is to gather critical contributions examining universities, academic labour, digital media, and capitalism. The articles col-

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lected in this special issue (1) provide the context, history and theoretical concepts underlying academic labour, (2) analyse the relationship between academic work and digital media/new information and communication technologies/the Internet/social media, and (3) discuss the political potentials and challenges within and beyond higher education institutions. The papers cover one or more of the following or related questions.

1. Contextualising and Theorising Academic Labour

- What is the historical role of universities and academic labour and how has it changed over time?
- What is the role of universities for capitalist development in the age of neoliberalism and post-Fordism (e.g. employability, market-driven and industrial research)?
- How far can the neoliberal university be considered as medium and outcome of informational capitalism?
- How far can the university expansion be understood as a dialectic development of progress and regress, social achievement and advanced commodification?
- What is meant by concepts such as Warwick University Ltd, McUniversity, academic proletarianisation, edu-factory, Taylorization of higher education, corporate university, academic capitalism, entrepreneurial university, university gamble, digital diploma mills, global university, DIY university, Uberification of the university, gig academia etc. in the context of academic labour? How are these concepts related to the wider social context and the existing capitalist order? How can a systematic typology of the existing literature be constructed?
- What is the role of the concept of value for understanding academic labour?
- What is the role of the concepts of the working class and the proletariat for theorising academic labour?
- How should we define academic labour; who is included/excluded by this understanding? Where does adjunct labour stand?
- What kind of workers are academics and how are they related to knowledge, informational and cultural workers?
- How far can the outcomes of academic labour be considered as part of the information and communication commons?
- To what extent rests informational capitalism on the commons produced at universities?
- What are the important dimensions for constructing a typology of working conditions within higher education (e.g. new managerialism, audit culture, workload, job insecurity)?
- How do different working contexts and conditions in academia shape feelings of autonomy, flexibility and reputation on the one hand and precariousness, overwork and dissatisfaction on the other?

2. Academic Labour and Digital Media

- Given that the academic work process is today strongly mediated through digital media, to what extent can academic workers be considered as digital workers, and academic labour as digital labour?
- In what ways can digital education and online distance learning be understood as a new capital accumulation strategy that aims at attracting international students in a commodified and competitive higher education market?

- In what ways can digital education be regarded as a response to neoliberal conditions within higher education?
- How do digital media/new information and communication technologies/the Internet/social media frame the working conditions of academics?
- How are the working conditions of academics characterised by intensification and extension in the realm of the digital university (e.g. the blurring of working space and other spaces of human life, the blurring of labour and free time, fast academia, always-on cultures, deskilling, casualisation, electronic monitoring, digital surveillance, social media use for self-promotion, new forms of intellectual property rights)?

3. Politics, Struggles and Alternatives

- How do the broader political realities and potentials in terms of solidarity, participation and democracy at universities look like?
- What is the relationship between the state and academic labour? What are some of the lessons that we can learn from global crackdowns on academic labour?
- What are the challenges in order to reclaim the university as site of struggle for both academics and students?
- How far can the struggle at universities be connected to the global struggle against capitalism?
- How do the political potentials of alternatives within higher education look like (e.g. informal learning processes, co-operative education, open education, open access, copyleft, creative and digital commons, Wikiversity)?

In his opening piece to the special issue, **Thomas Allmer** contextualises universities historically within capitalism and analyses academic labour and the deployment of digital media theoretically and critically. Based on a critical social theory approach, he engages with the history and context of universities in informational capitalism, deals with the forms and concepts of academic labour, and provides a systematic analysis of working conditions at higher education institutions. The article outlines the impact of new information and communication technologies on academic labour. Allmer ultimately concludes with a summary, discusses political potentials and provides alternatives.

Based on the critique of value (*Wertkritik*) and in the context of the structural crisis of capitalism, **Maxime Ouellet and Éric Martin** scrutinize the transformations at universities and the new knowledge production regime in informational capitalism. In particular, they argue that the post-war expansion of the university should be seen in the context of a capital-labour compromise and the institutionalisation of the American New Deal under Fordist conditions. The authors describe the neoliberal university as an important hub for technological innovation and for the valorisation of capital. In global capitalism, we can now observe a globalised university that remains agile, hyper-reactive and adaptable, transforming academic subjectivity.

Richard Hall's contribution to the special issue asks what alternatives proletarianised universities can produce to counter hopelessness and anxiety derived from academic labour's alienation. For Hall, 'mass intellectuality' and social forms of knowledge can open a path towards "a struggle over the proletarianisation of labour, and its emancipatory implications". As Hall considers various examples of practical responses to the neoliberal reduction of knowledge production to economic value, he especially underlines the significance of community-based solidarity between higher

education institutions and other social spaces outside the formal boundaries of the university.

With a particular focus on US media and communication departments, **Marco Briziarelli and Joseph L. Flores** provide an interpretation of the condition of the academic profession and observe a contradictory position of academics in terms of class, value production and subjectivity. The authors reject the idealist notion of academics and place academic work in the context of knowledge work and informational capitalism and thereby provide a general account of the political economy of academic labour. The article offers an analysis of the political economy of academic publishing and teaching and concludes with an argument for initiatives such as *Precarious Workers Brigades* and *Carrot Workers Collective* in the UK, *Quinto Stato* in Italy, and the *Cultural Workers Organize* in Canada.

Jamie Woodcock investigates the shifts and transformations of the university and the academic labour process in times of neoliberalism and the introduction of new digital technologies. He thereby moves beyond the simple return to a romanticised pre-neoliberal university and studies the subsumption of research and teaching under the imperatives of capital. Based on Marx's idea of the labour process, he analyses the academic labour process and the impact of digitalisation accordingly. With the help of concepts gained from the Operaismo movement, he finally discusses the technical and political composition of academic workers and concludes with political alternatives for a different kind of university.

Jan Fernback takes issue with how the ideology of information society has repurposed universities and professorial labour in the lines of managerialism. Drawing on Michel Foucault's notion of disciplinary power, Fernback demonstrates how practical implementations of ICTs Taylorise and routinise academic work, produce audit cultures, and lead to the virtualisation of higher education institutions through an enterprise ethic. However, Fernback's piece is also invested in resistance. Therefore, she introduces Paolo Freire's work and his notion of 'critical consciousness' in his discussion of various responses to neoliberal logics at work in higher education institutions.

Christophe Magis encourages us to consider how the digital humanities movement can be viewed as offering a critical analysis of the academic system from within the walls of universities, specifically concerning the theory vs. practice debate. Under the fan of "hack" vs. "yack", digital humanists criticise the current academic landscape and its appertaining priority of intellectual labour (yack) over manual work/digital literacy (hack), visible for instance in the reality that digital humanists are seldom offered the tenure track. Ultimately, Magis avers that the academic system should aim at an academic concept of theory and a political concept of practice, a change that would revive the disposition of academia and thus its role in society.

Karen Gregory and sava saheli singh discuss the digital terrain and examine the potentials of 'academic rant' and dissent through two case studies: #iammargaretmary and the globally contentious case of Steven Salaita. On the one hand, digital media, specifically Twitter, have given us platforms through which academic labour is promoted echoing the media celebrity culture. On the other hand, Gregory and singh make a case for how Twitter as a platform for rant and similar negative emotions can affectively form spaces for collective action and professional support for each other as formal mechanisms for solidarity erode.

Focusing on the educational aspects of academic labour, **Andreas Wittel** invites us to think about academic labour in relation to gift. For Wittel, despite intense tendencies towards alienation and proletarianisation, gift-giving and social interaction are vital to the practice of education. Wittel ultimately argues that although gift within

higher education is under attack, a political economy of higher education as commons carries enough potential to rethink the university beyond the neoliberal logics. Despite their relative lack of power, Wittel proposes free and autonomous universities as new spaces for a university system beyond alienated wage labour.

Zeena Feldman and Marisol Sandoval's article is comprised of two parts. The first part explores the metric-driven culture of neoliberal university environment and examines how 'metric power' shapes academic labour. Situating their work within the highly neoliberal higher education system of the UK, the authors then identify a typology of resistance comprised of four pillars: abstention, attack, adaptation and alternatives. The article therefore challenges the accounts regarding lack of resistance against individualised academic labour, but also draws attention to how struggles within the university need to link with struggles within the broader society.

Finally, **Güven Bakırezer, Derya Keskin Demirer and Adem Yeşilyurt** (reflection, non-peer-reviewed) contribute to the special issue with their concrete experience within and beyond the boundaries of formal university institutions in Turkey. Dismissed from their official positions as dissident academics, Bakirezer, Demirer and Yesilyurt reflect on the pressures of neoliberal authoritarianism on academic labour. In their article, the authors specifically focus on Kocaeli Academy for Solidarity (KODA), founded in September 2016 as a form of resistance to the academic purge in Turkey. As the authors underline almost in a conversational manner with the rest of the special issue, alternative educational spaces have a chance of success only if they are "capable of creating a realistic alternative against the marketized educational system". Through the case study of KODA, this contribution raises important questions about the links between authoritarian politics, freedom of speech, and neoliberalism.

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